basic requirements for food, nutrition and health. These shelters also have provisions for health care, quality and flexi-time education and vocational training, including provision for children to safely keep their belongings earnings.

Children in difficult circumstances

1204. SHRIMATI MOHSINA KIDWAI: Will the Minister of WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that a report, 'Status of Children in India 2008', reveals that a vast group of children living in difficult circumstances such as children of long-term patients, women prisoners children with special needs, riot, militancy and disaster-affected children, refugee and displaced children, and children in orphanages and homes do not receive early childhood education;

(b) if so, the efforts made by Government in this regard; and

(c) the progress of existing schemes in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT (SHRIMATI KRISHNA TIRATH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) Early Childhood Education (ECE) is one of the services provided under the Ministry of Women and Child Development's, Integrated Child Development Services Scheme to children of 3-6 years. The scheme has been universalized to cover all habitations in the country which includes children in difficult circumstances also. Presently about 3.32 crore children are the beneficiaries of the ECE services under the scheme.

The Rajiv Gandhi National Creche Scheme of this Ministry also provides for pre-school education for children between 3-6 years of age, in the crèches. As on date Ministry has sanctioned 31718 creches with capacity of 25 children each.

The newly launched Integrated Child Protection Scheme provides for maintaining minimum standards of care in child care institutions for children in need of care and protection, including children in difficult circumstances. The minimum standards of care include age appropriate education. This scheme is implemented from the current financial year 2009-10.

Underage marriage

1205. SHRI BHAGAT SINGH KOSHYARI: Will the Minister of WOMEN AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that more than a third of the world's child brides are from India, according to studies conducted by UNICEF;

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto; and

(c) the steps being taken by Government to impose ban on such underage marriages by educating the parent through Government Agencies/NGOs?